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With the Author's love
“Rendering unto God.”

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE CHAPEL OF MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE,

On Sunday, October 2nd, 1881,

In commemoration of the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels,

BEING THE

ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHAPEL,

BY THE

REV. E. S. TALBOT, M.A.,

Warden of Keble College, Oxford.

Published at the request of the Sixth Form.

Marlborough:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY E. AND R. A. LUCY,
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A SERMON

LUKE XII., 48.

“Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”

IF I began speaking to you to-day by saying that we live in a time of enlightenment, you would say, ‘what a commonplace!’ ‘But have you considered,’ ‘I should answer,’ ‘the use of commonplaces?’ Make it a habit to get all you can out of commonplaces. Commonplaces are the common sayings in which great numbers of men have put thoughts upon which they agree, and which come often into their minds. No doubt such sayings are often very shallow or very one-sided: handed on from one mouth to another, they go on being repeated till the truth in them, like the stamp on an old coin, gets rubbed away and blurred. So do not be the slaves of commonplaces: they are very good servants, but very bad masters: if you want to be sensible, clear-headed, and honest in your thoughts make it your habit to examine them, and not merely to parrot them.

But yet, as I said, believe in them : attack them, not to tear them to pieces and destroy them, but to get out of them the truth which they contain. If they had not truth in them more or less they would never have become common : just as it is the beautiful parts of the country which get over-run with tourists.

And now as to this commonplace of our living in a time of enlightenment. It is not wholly true, but let us take it for the truth there is in it. And in this we cannot, I think, be wrong ; for this reason, that the Bible and the world seem on this point to tell us the same thing. The Bible does so, for it tells us that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has turned darkness to light. And the world is always saying in talk, and books, and newspapers that we live in more enlightened days than our forefathers. And so, if you challenge your own thoughts you will find, I think, that you have come yourself to take this for granted, and though possibly you may have a romantic feeling about this or that period in the past, yet your real settled ordinary way of thinking is that we live in much more enlightened days than those.

Let us then assume that it is so, and ask what follows ? I want you to consider whether the text does not give us the true answer. If we have this advantage, we ought to turn it to account : we should have something to shew for it. And if you say that

this too is a commonplace, I answer first, that it is one of the commonplaces which we owe to Christianity, one of those golden truths which Christ has made common property: and secondly, that if it is a commonplace, it is not a common thing, and will require no common effort really to act up to it. No, do not let us call this a commonplace: but rather a heart-stirring call, crying aloud to all that is noble, and honourable, and loyal in us; and saying you have received splendid gifts, put them to splendid use: do not take them to be selfishly enjoyed: do not boast of them, since you owe them to no doing of your own: but let them bind your heart by ever fresh ties of gratitude to God the giver, and fill you with ever fresh desire to use them in the way which is most to His Glory, that is by using them for the good of men.

“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits towards me?”*

What is it then that we have received? Ah! more a hundredfold than we ever realize! the splendid inheritance of a young English Christian gentleman is a thing so large and rich that any one whose heart is thoughtful and grateful enough to begin to think of it will find himself fairly unable to realise and measure its wealth. Upon how many generations of experience and effort it is built up! How many noble lives of action and of endurance have gone to contribute to it! How many influences, political, intellectual, religious,

* Ps. cxvi., 12.

each yielding to it their best, have gone to make it what it is! Look at its mere outward security and peace, contrasted with the long ages when with sword at your side, or pistol in your belt, a time of war was hardly less dangerous to you than a time of peace. Look at its inherited refinement of taste and feeling: at its stored-up treasures of human thought and emotion and aspiration accumulated in the great literatures, and distilled in quintessence by the master poets. Look at its profuse and boundless knowledge, such that be your interests what they will you can choose your field of knowledge and find abundant information and helpful guides, in place of a few cumbrous rolls of manuscript, or the crabbed type of an unwieldy folio. But I will not try to go on describing what we have. You can do it for yourselves: and, what is more, such things are worth little except as we do them for ourselves. Rhetoric and froth in the mouth of a speaker or preacher, they become real and solid only when, as thoughts in the mind of any one of us, they move him to wonder and to praise. I ask you to carry your thoughts past all which you owe to the Founders of Marlborough, the life, the teaching, the traditions of your School,—past all these to that great whole out of the bosom of which all such particular benefits and blessings come, and to which, though it is too great and manifold to be adequately

expressed in language, we give the name of our Christian Civilization. Let us turn from general descriptions to two or three particular points.

1.—You are occupied for much of your time with the classical authors. You begin by taking them as a task, and construe out a passage for practice in Latin or Greek. Then as you get older and know the languages better, you begin perhaps to take pleasure in their literary beauty: the fresh morning-air of Homer, the grandeur of Æschylus, the strength of Thucydides, the sparkle of Horace, the grace and skill of Virgil: and moreover you find in them passages of shrewd wisdom or noble thought which you admire and remember. But have you ever considered the difference as regards these books between yourself and the boy of your age in ancient times? Have you ever thought what it would be to be dependent upon these authors for your principles and your guidance? Suppose your Bible out of the way: suppose yourself without the simple Christian teachings of childhood: and in place of them these classical books. If you believed the stories of the poets about the gods and heroes what strange patterns they set up for your conduct: how degrading many of the thoughts which they put into your mind. Do you know that the philosopher Plato when he was planning a perfect state and a perfect system of education said that he

must banish the poets because they filled the thoughts of the young with false and unworthy thoughts ?* And if you did *not* believe these stories—as was no doubt the case with many in the later days of Greece and Rome—in what a state of perplexity this left you. For these poems and legends professed to tell of Zeus and Apollo, or of Venus and Mars, the very deities to whom belonged the temples in the streets and squares of your own city. And if what the poets told was false, what truth about the gods was there to know? And if these gods did not exist, what gods were there for you to know? How uncertain it all was! How little to guide you! How little to check you from a life of mere pleasure and indulgence! How little to encourage you to live for anything more than the present, to put before yourself high and noble aims. Think of this when you read the classics. Let it make you fairer and kinder to the men of those days: let it lead you to honour more highly their efforts to live nobly, with so little by which to live: to be less of a Pharisee in judging their shortcomings, the dark sides of their best and greatest lives. But especially be thankful for the difference between their helps and yours, between Homer and the New Testament: between a literary enjoyment of the classics, and a dependence on them as guides of life.

* Plato Republic ii., pp. 378, 383.

2.—This leads us on to a second point, akin to it. Think of the things which we take for granted, of which we are sure, in the matter of right and wrong. We are sure, (are we not?) that to be pure is good, and that impurity, filthy conversation, and the like is bad. We are sure that humility is better than conceit: we are sure that unselfishness is the noblest rule of life. Mind, I do not say that we show these things in our lives. Alas, there is plenty of doing what we know we ought not to do: and leaving undone what we know we ought to do. But I speak not of what we do but of what we hold, not of our conduct but of our principles. And though this blessing like any other may be turned into a curse if we are unfaithful and sin against light, yet a blessing it must be that the goodness of purity and humility and unselfishness is taken for granted among us: that we have these principles at the bottom of our hearts, deep in our consciences: that they are always speaking to us and pleading with us. So much are they matters of course with us that we hardly realize that they were not always as plain as they are to us. Yet what do you think were the thoughts about purity of a boy who found Aphrodite or Bacchus among his country's gods, and their hymns among its sacred poetry? Do you think he took it for granted that purity was a thing for which God made us, and from which it is a

shame and sin to fall? Or as to humility, do you know that the greatest moral philosopher in Greece, drawing what is evidently an ideal portrait,* described a man, the "great-souled man," whose every gesture and act betrays the spirit of self-esteem and self-assertion? Or, as to unselfishness, have you realized that Christian teaching has worked nothing less than a revolution in this respect: that it has created for us the beautiful thought of a life lived for others: and that where we as a matter of course put unselfishness the Greek put self-culture, or (in plain English) making the best of yourself, and the Oriental perhaps might put a mere cruel self-destruction? So true it is that these things which seem so natural to us were long unrecognised or dimly seen: and among our highest blessings we must reckon this, that we know and know certainly that purity and humility and unselfishness are good. No doubt these things never are spoken against: and you may find it no easy part of your life's battle to stand true to them: to hold fast the nobleness of purity when people tell you that it is not the way of the world, or excuse impurity as natural, or even dress it up with poetry and art. But the inheritance is none the less ours because there are men who try to rob us of it. We might as well light our houses with rushlights, or travel in stage coaches, as willingly go back to uncertainty about these things

* Aristotle *Eth. Nicom.* iv. (3).

of which the light of Christian truth has made us certain. It would be travelling the road of history the wrong way, from light towards darkness, from true civilization towards barbarism.

Act upon the instincts and the principles which have been won for you by the blood and sweat of the moral struggles of many centuries. Refuse to reopen settled questions, to unravel finished work. Refuse to discuss the law of purity or the law of unselfishness as you would the law of gravitation. Send those who would debate them to history and their own consciences. Act upon them: and they will prove themselves to you and to others.

3.—Once more, let me take you to a very simple thing, but one which is the very centre of our Christian possessions. Have you ever thought sufficiently what we possess in *the example of Jesus Christ*?

The most famous ancient book on moral conduct, the Ethics of Aristotle, advised that to find what is right you should take what the good man thought right.* The advice was good: but who and where was the good man? Since Christ's time that question has had a clear and certain answer. That wonderful power for good, the power of a good example, has been displayed perfectly by a Perfect Character: ideal, and yet perfectly real. Here is a fact in our possession. It is recognised by those who do not believe in Christ as

* Aristotle Eth. Nicom. ii. (6). 15.

we do, but who again and again come forward to acknowledge Him as the Perfect pattern of human Character. Have you thought what a possession this is, what a beacon-light for one who seeks the true path on the journey of life, the way of true manliness, the true life of a true man? The young artist seeks master-pieces to copy; the young soldier seeks a hero to follow. As his master-piece to the artist, and as his hero to the soldier, so to us in our life's work and battle is the Portrait and the Figure of Jesus Christ.

If we could see things truly we should recognise, I think, as the central light of our enlightenment the possession of that Portrait in a book which we can all buy; which we can all read; which in a sense we can all understand; in which any of us can make out for himself if he tries what Christ was really like, what the Great Example is which all agree that we ought to imitate. How happy I should be if I could think that my words—on this one occasion on which it is given to me to speak to you—would lead any of you to make a life's practice from your boyhood onward of such honest and humble seeking in the Gospel for the power of the example of Jesus Christ.

Such seeking will find more than it seeks: an example but more than an example: an Example whose beauty will grow upon you wonderfully, while you will find that in many simple common things there

is room to copy It. But more than an example. For Christ makes certain to us things which to those who knew or know not Christ could be hopes at best : He makes us certain what our God is; that we live in a world which a good God rules; that He cares for us, since He has sent His Son for our sakes; that it is worth while to do good, and that to do evil is a horrible falling away from God, and from all that is natural and happy and God-like. And, in yet another sense, more than an example. For the portrait (if I may so speak) comes down out of its frame, and takes us by the hand. He Whom you study in the Gospel as an Example you will soon feel to be also a Living and Loving Friend, secretly drawing your hearts to Himself, secretly encouraging and helping you to give yourself to goodness.

I have shewn you, brethren, have I not? that you have richly received, that ‘unto you has been given much :’ and now I beg you do not let the thoughts pass away: think of these things: realize now and often your advantages: reckon up your wealth: how true is it that what we most need is not to know more or to have more, but to make more of what we have, and realize more in what we know ! *Lift* your eyes to the height of what is given you, for it towers high, and you must lift your eyes from your own level and the level of the things which amuse us and engross us in order to see it: *enlarge*

your hearts to take it in, for our hearts are very narrow chambers,* only God has given them a wonderful power of enlarging to take in what is good.

If you do this you will ‘see your calling:’ you will feel bound to walk “worthy of that calling”† which sounds to you through every blessing that God has given to you, but sounds loudest through that which you have in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Standing at the outset of your life with the unhewn block before you which it is yours to fashion, you will grasp—oh why should you not?—what so many learn painfully and late, the true and brilliant secret of what life is, a secret which is yet plain and open for those who have eyes to see; that it is not an enjoyment of self for self’s sake alone, not an eating and drinking for a few days before we die, not a strife for success, but a rendering of ourselves to God for all the benefits that He hath done unto us.

* 2 Cor. vi., 12.

† Eph. iv., 1.



IN ALL TIME OF OUR WEALTH:
GOOD LORD, DELIVER US.

